

# EDUCATION

A high school diploma is one of the most important keys to a successful life. And yet, thousands of students drop out of school each day around the nation. During this seminar, you will be asked to identify what might lead you or your fellow students to leave school, and to propose specific changes to lower dropout rates. The problem is at the mythical Enchantment High School, where only 250 seniors graduated from a class that held more than 500 students four years ago.

## Questions to Consider

- Is the dropout rate really a problem?
- Why are students dropping out?
- Why should you care?
- What is going on at “Enchantment High”?
- What should be done?

# INTRODUCTION

With thousands of students dropping out each day, the dropout crisis is one of the most troubling issues facing schools in the United States. During this session, you will be asked to identify what might lead you or your fellow students to leave school and to propose specific changes to lower dropout rates at the imaginary Enchantment High.

## What is Going On At "Enchantment High"?

There are some extremely serious problems at Enchantment High, which has an enrollment of almost 2,000 students and provides a wide range of classes and programs for students. While the official dropout rate is 12 percent, at Enchantment High only 250 seniors graduated from a class that started out with more than 500 students four years ago. After years of complaints, parents and students are becoming concerned and the state is talking about taking over the school if no progress is made.

## Should Anyone Care About Dropouts?

While some students and teachers are sometimes glad to see a troubled student leave, high dropout rates are not just a problem for the students who are dropping out. Individually, students who drop out often face limited job prospects. Many high school dropouts do not find adequate work and, statistically, have a higher likelihood of criminal activity, broken families, unemployment, and reliance on public assistance. Dropouts affect everyone who pays taxes and contributes to the community – not just themselves.

### How Many Dropouts Are There?

The numbers of students who drop out are staggering both for New Mexico and the nation: over 7,500 per year in New Mexico, and over half a million per year nationally. That's almost 3,000 students dropping out each day of the school year. Dropout rates for Hispanic students are disproportionately high, and a recent national report showed a dropout rate in some schools of more than 50 percent between freshman year and graduation. With an annual dropout rate that has often exceeded 8 percent, New Mexico has one of the highest dropout rates in the nation.

### Why So Many Dropouts?

Some of the common explanations for why so many students are dropping out include in-school factors such as lack of early childhood education, boredom with classes, large schools, large classes, inadequate materials, academic difficulties, lack of after-school and mentoring programs, quality of teaching, and bilingual education programs. External factors often used to explain dropout rates include single-parent families, poverty levels, community or cultural values, teen pregnancy, gang activity, immigration policy, and misleading data.

### What Should Be Done?

The decision about what should be done will be yours to make. Taking on roles such as parents, administrators, students, teachers, and elected officials, you will all look at the situation at Enchantment High and make specific proposals about what each of the involved agencies and stakeholders should do.

# N a t i o n a l      P e r s p e c t i v e      -      F i n d i n g s

- ✓ Reasons for dropout vary and impact all kinds of students:
  - ❑ Students who are not academically challenged;
  - ❑ Students who need to financially support themselves or their families;
  - ❑ Students who are not engaged by traditional high school offerings;
  - ❑ Students who do not possess adequate literacy skills to complete high school requirements;
  - ❑ Students who have difficulty with attendance;
  - ❑ Students who have substance abuse problems;
  - ❑ Students who have been impacted by violence - in their homes, in their schools, or in their communities:
  - ❑ Students who have become parents;
  - ❑ Students who interact or communicate poorly with teachers;
  - ❑ Students who do not speak, read, or write English well, or not at all.
- ✓ Between 1990 and 1995, high school students whose parents did not finish high school were, on average, three times more likely to drop out than those students whose parents had at least some post-secondary education (National Center for Education Statistics - July 1997).
- ✓ Students from families with the lowest income are eight times more likely than their peers from families with high incomes to be out of school without high school certification (National Center for Education Statistics - July 1997).

Source: State Department of Education response to  
House Memorial 73 (November 17, 1997)

# NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE - SOLUTIONS

- ✓ Early academic intervention to target literacy skills
- ✓ Early intervention to target English language development
- ✓ Student connection to one significant adult at school (middle and high school)
- ✓ Safe schools
- ✓ Increased counseling (quantity and quality) - both career and personal
- ✓ Using student input to identify causes and solutions
- ✓ Students who become parents need to be high school graduates themselves to break the dropout cycle
- ✓ School-to-work initiatives which connect mid- and secondary-level school experiences to the world of work and careers
- ✓ High schools must offer a range of educational choices - one size does not fit all
- ✓ Clear academic standards and expectations for courses and high school graduation
- ✓ Recognition and honors for students who persist at achieving standards - rewarding hard work as well as ability.

Source: State Department of Education response to  
House Memorial 73 (November 17, 1997)

# S T A T E   P E R S P E C T I V E   -   F I N D I N G S

*Information taken from the Longitudinal Study by Colorado State University and Albuquerque Public Schools (APS ) Research Collaborative. The research project involves two phases: an initial survey at a time of dropping out and a follow-up survey approximately three years after the initial survey.*

- ✓ The study reflects other studies: dropouts have very low GPAs, are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities, have more disciplinary problems at school, and are more likely to be retained.
- ✓ Third grade achievement test scores indicate that dropouts were already substantially behind in language skills. Increasing emphasis on language development in the early grades is an absolute necessity.
- ✓ Three variables predict whether a dropout will successfully return to school.
  1. Peer relations: if a dropout associates with individuals who completed high school, then the dropout was more likely to obtain a GED. Likewise, if a dropout has friends who are attending college then he/she was more likely to obtain a high school diploma. Other studies have found that peer relationships are very predictive of school achievement.
  2. Third grade achievement test scores: those dropouts with higher reading scores were more likely to obtain a GED or high school diploma, and those dropouts with higher math scores were more likely to obtain a diploma.
  3. The dropouts's expectations after he/she dropped out of school: those individuals who indicated they were going to get a GED or diploma were more likely to attain this goal than those dropouts who did not indicate an intention to earn a GED or diploma. However, a large number of dropouts who expected to get their GEDs or diplomas failed to do so.

Source: State Department of Education response to  
House Memorial 73 (November 17, 1997)

# S T A T E   P E R S P E C T I V E   -   S O L U T I O N S

- ✓ Inclusion of at-risk factors in the funding formula
- ✓ Alternative Schools, Programs, and Settings. Examples include:
  - ❑ San Andres High School in Las Cruces
  - ❑ Career Enrichment Center in Albuquerque Public Schools
  - ❑ Family Partnership in West Las Vegas
  - ❑ Advanced Placement throughout the state
  - ❑ Carnegie Middle School Initiatives
- ✓ Graduation Reality and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) has been very successful
- ✓ Schools Within Schools with a particular emphasis on 9<sup>th</sup> grade students
- ✓ Career Academies

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...a key to success in strengthening New Mexico schools and improving our graduation rate...

- ✓ Systemic improvement in language development and early intervention to target literacy skills

Source: State Department of Education response to  
House Memorial 73 (November 17, 1997)